



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

XV.—COÖRDINATION AND THE COMMA.

Those who consider punctuation ‘largely a matter of taste’ and look upon the so-called ‘sentence-sense’ as a kind of sixth sense that comes only from generations of gentle breeding, will regard with small favor the attempt to formulate any very definite principles governing the structure of the sentence; but those who have little faith in the subjective conclusions of capricious taste will welcome any systematic presentation of facts that may enable them to settle points of disputed usage for themselves. It is with this conviction that I offer the following contribution to the study of the sentence, not without hope that it may incite others to a more thoro investigation of related problems of English usage.

The use of the comma alone between coördinate clauses which should without question be pointed as independent sentences, as in,

A New Forest Ballad is also good, it ends thus—¹

or of the comma and a purely logical connective when usage demands at least a semicolon, as in,

John was an old servant, and had known his master when he was the cadet of the house, therefore he often gave him his Christian name,²

is generally considered the mark of an illiterate or slovenly style. Yet the distinction between right and wrong usage in this respect is sometimes so subtle that even the careful writer may occasionally be at fault. It is the purpose of this paper to determine more definitely: (a) under what

¹ Frederic Harrison, *Early Victorian Literature*, p. 167.

² Charlotte Bronte, *Jane Eyre*.

conditions the comma alone is sufficient ; and (*b*) what distinction is to be made between 'structural,' or grammatical, and non-structural, or 'logical,' connectives.

The conclusions that have been reached are based upon more than 16,000 pages of nineteenth century prose, from De Quincey and Carlyle to Walter Pater and Mr. John Morley, including thirty-five authors and ranging in subject matter from miscellaneous essays to novels and familiar letters. In matters of punctuation it is not always possible to discriminate between author and printer. The publishing house has its system of pointing, from which only eternal vigilance can protect the intelligent writer. But mechanical rules are uniform in their operation and take no account of subtle variations ; least of all do they meddle with the interrelation of independent clauses. It is safe to assume, therefore, that the examples cited below reveal in almost every case the intention of the author ; and this assumption finds confirmation in the fact that, whereas authors differ widely in the pointing of coördinate clauses, no corresponding difference is to be found among publishers.

The first part of this paper will deal with all sentences containing independent clauses separated by the comma alone. The three-clause series in which the last two members are joined by the conjunction is too common to detain us. I may say in passing, however, that in every instance the comma is retained before the conjunction. When the conjunction is omitted, the series, usually of a climactic order, has sufficient structural significance to bind the clauses together without the use of the semicolon, as in the following example :

Romulus does not mount into heaven, Epimenides does not awake,
Arthur does not return.¹

¹ Arnold, *God and the Bible*.

This construction is also a familiar one. It is legitimate only when the three clauses are equally coördinate in thought—they must form a genuine series. If they do not, the semicolon must be used to show that two of the clauses are in parallel dependence upon the third, thus forming what may be called an *Imperfect Series*. The two coördinate clauses may give details elucidating or enforcing a general statement, as in,

Hints were dropping about the neighborhood ; the hedgeways twittered, the tree-tops cawed ;¹

the relation may be causal, as in,

Anon the applauses wax fainter, or threaten to cease ; she is heavy of heart, the light of her face has fled ;²

or obverse, as in,

It is not a Convent, it is not a Seminary ; it is a place to fit men of the world for the world ;³

or may reveal some more subtle discrimination difficult to classify.

But our chief concern is with the use of the comma between two coördinate clauses which do not form part of a three-clause series. Of such usage 688 examples (about 1 to every 23 pages) have been collated. A rigid classification shows, however, that nearly half of these are not in a strict sense coördinate, but may be accounted for in the following three ways :—

1. In about 152 of the examples one of the clauses is so obviously subordinate in meaning that the coördinate structure, deceiving no one, has become more or less conventional or idiomatic. This we may call *Veiled Subordination* and classify as follows :

¹ Meredith, *The Egoist*.

² Carlyle, *The French Revolution*.

³ Newman, *Idea of a University*.

a. Causal dependence involving the omission of some such word as *because*, *since* :

His kisses will not wound, the hair on his lip is yet light.

Arnold, *Essays in Criticism*, I, p. 240.

Thou canst not speak, called one, *the blood of Danton chokes thee*.

Morley, *Miscellanies*, I, p. 126.

The tone is playful, Gray was not yet twenty-one.

Arnold, *Essays in Criticism*, II, p. 86.

The doors are well watched, no improper figure can enter.

Carlyle, *The French Revolution*.

b. As object of the verb of a preceding clause, usually involving an omitted *that* :

I protest, my lord duke, I do not comprehend your Grace.

Landor, *Imaginary Conversations*.

c. With a correlative involving the omission of *that* :

And I dare not look back on it, my heart is so weak.

Newman, *Callista*.

As to his poetry, Emerson's word shall suffice for us, it is so accurate and so prettily said : . . . Stevenson, *Thoreau*.

I really half believe you are a Faun, there is such a mystery and terror for you in these dark moods. Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*.

d. With a verb of permission or command equivalent to *if* or *tho* :

Let him be drenched, his heart will sing. Meredith, *The Egoist*.

We may struggle as we please, we are not born economists. Stevenson, *The Amateur Emigrant*.

Open the book where you will, it takes you out of doors. Lowell, *My Garden Acquaintance*.

In like manner, sow small-pox in the human body, your crop is small-pox. Tyndall, *Fermentation*.

e. A less obvious kind of *Veiled Subordination* is *Apposition* between one clause and a significant phrase of the other, sometimes involving an omitted *in that*, *that is*, *that is to say*, or even a whole dependent clause :

The claim was to be jumped next morning, that was all that she would condescend upon. Stevenson, *The Silverado Squatters*.

One thing you may be assured of, he will be proud of you. Meredith, *The Egoist*.

You are right, my dear sir, she is rather old. Dickens, *Pickwick Papers*.

It has this advantage as a witness, it cannot be debauched. Emerson, *The Method of Nature*.

The history of reform is always identical, it is the comparison of the idea with the fact. Emerson, *Lecture on the Times*.

2. In 88 examples both clauses stand in parallel relation to a restricting word, phrase, or dependent clause. This we may call *Common Restriction*.

a. Conjunction :

But, as we have insisted in a previous chapter, art is not life, it is not even an exact transcript of life. Winchester, *Principles of Literary Criticism*, p. 309.

b. Prepositional phrase :

In the sublimest flights of the soul, rectitude is never surmounted, love is never outgrown. Emerson, *Divinity College Address*.

c. Participial phrase :

Rising in his strength, he will break through the trammels of words, he will scatter human voices, even the sweetest, to the winds. Newman, *Idea of a University*.

d. Infinitive :

We are not bound, perhaps we are not able, to show that the form of government which he recommends is bad. Macaulay, *Westminster Reviewer's Defence of Mill*.

e. Common object :

Who it was by dying that had earned the splendid trophy, I know not, I inquired not. Lamb, *Essays of Elia*.

f. Dependent clause :

Well, but though Mr. Whitford does not give you money, he gives you his time, he tries to get you into the navy. Meredith, *The Egoist*.

It was the Troad, it was Asia that in those days constituted the great enemy of Greece. De Quincey, *Style*.

You need not speak to me, I need not go where you are, that you should exert magnetism on me. Emerson, *The Method of Nature*.

3. In 79 of the examples one of the clauses serves merely to introduce, to conclude, or parenthetically to elucidate or enforce the other. Such clauses may be called *Tags*.

a. Initial and final tags, chiefly exclamatory :

Doubt it not, he had his own sorrows : Carlyle, *Heroes and Hero Worship*.

God help thee, Elia, how art thou changed ! Lamb, *Essays of Elia*.

I'm not treating her ill, I'm not indeed. Newman, *Callista*.

b. Parenthetical tags :

I don't believe Mr. Peter came home from India as rich as a nabob, he even considered himself poor, but neither he nor Miss Matty cared much about that. Mrs. Gaskell, *Cranford*.

When we have in this manner eliminated all cases of apparent coördination, we discover that the remaining examples, 369 (or 1 to every 43 pages) readily fall into one large group characterized by a more or less clearly marked balance of thought and expression. In other words, *Balance* is in two-clause coördination what the series is in three-clause coördination—a structural equivalent for the semicolon.

1. The most common form of Balance is *Antithesis* :

You began with a dream, you are ending with a vision. Landor, *Imaginary Conversations*.

Heat kills the bacteria, cold numbs them. Tyndall, *Fragments of Science*, II, p. 270.

Wives are plentiful, friends are rare. Meredith, *The Egoist*.

With Dante the main question is the saving of the soul, with Chaucer it is the conduct of life. Lowell, *Chaucer*.

Teresa breaks in her pupils, Natalia forms them. Dowden, *New Studies*, p. 177.

2. *Obverse Repetition* may also be considered a form of Antithesis :

I did not pick her up, she was left on my hands. Bronte, *Jane Eyre*.
 . . . ; all beautiful proportions are unique, they are not general formulae. Ruskin, *Seven Lamps of Architecture*.

They are not tended, they are only regularly shorn. Carlyle, *The French Revolution*.

She had not uttered words, she had shed meanings. Meredith, *The Egoist*.

3. When antithesis is lacking, the balance usually includes some degree of repetition of thought or phrase. We may have repetition of thought alone, giving (a) Cumulative Repetition, (b) Progressive Repetition, (c) Synonymous Repetition.

a. Cumulative Repetition :

I could distinguish the merchant to whom the ship was consigned, I knew him by his calculating brow and restless air. Irving, *The Sketch Book*.

The moonlit hours passed by on silver wings, the twinkling stars looked friendly down upon him. Thackeray, *Burlesques*.

The fine nose had grown fleshy towards the point, the pale eyes were sunk in fat. Stevenson, *The Amateur Emigrant*.

b. Progressive Repetition :

Long night wears itself into day, morning's paleness is spread over all faces ; . . . Carlyle, *The French Revolution*.

. . . ; the city woke about him with its cheerful bustle, the sun climbed overhead ; . . . Stevenson, *Some College Memories*.

c. Synonymous Repetition :

Sense would resist delirium, judgment would warn passion. Bronte, *Jane Eyre*.

He has put on the strong armor of sickness, he is wrapped in the callous hide of suffering. Lamb, *Essays of Elia*.

Make all clear, convince the reason. Stevenson, *Virginibus Puerisque*.

. . . ; the long festival of the ravenous night is over, the world of darkness is in the throes of death ; . . . Swinburne, *Essays and Studies*, p. 39.

4. More frequently, however, the repetition of some significant word or phrase serves also to join the clauses. The following sentences illustrate the repetition of subject, verb, object, or modifier as the key-word of both clauses :

Reason gives us this law, reason tells us that it leads to eternal blessedness, and that those who follow it have no need of any other. Arnold, *Essays in Criticism*, I, p. 371.

It might be a duty, it might be a merit ; . . . Newman, *Callista*.

For us was thy back so bent, for us were thy straight limbs and fingers so deformed. Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*.

Here and now, just as of old in Palestine, he has the rich to dinner, it is with the rich that he takes his pleasure : . . . Stevenson, *Beggars*.

Dear to us hast thou been at this coming, dear to us shalt thou be when thou comest again. Arnold, *Essays in Criticism*, I, p. 241.

They all have the immediate beauty, they all give the direct delight of natural things. Swinburne, *Essays and Studies*, p. 374.

Under this head may also be placed the use of *correlatives* and *comparatives*.

Not only had Shelley dealings with money lenders, he now had dealings with bailiffs also. Arnold, *Essays in Criticism*, II, p. 232.

He now needs to know more than an author, he must know a period. Dowden, *New Studies*, p. 445.

Shakespeare's language is no longer the mere vehicle of thought, it has become part of it, its very flesh and blood. Lowell, *Shakespeare Once More*.

We have now concluded the first part of our classification ; and tho to classify is not to justify, it is at least significant that all but a score of the sentences collated should fall readily into one or more of the categories named above. In all cases of apparent coördination the comma would seem to be the necessary usage, and this is unquestionably true of *Common Restriction* and *Tags*. But in some forms of *Veiled Subordination*, such as *causal dependence* or

apposition, the subordination may be so slight as to warrant or require the use of the semicolon.

In all cases of clearly marked balance of thought or expression the writer uses at pleasure the comma or the semicolon. When the balanced clauses are long or complicated by the use of other commas, the semicolon is preferable; when the balanced clauses are but part of a larger sentence, the comma is preferable. To the latter class belong 197 of the examples collated. There remain, therefore, but 172 examples of the use of the comma in *independent balance*, giving us the remarkably small ratio of 1 to every 93 pages. So rare a usage clearly indicates a preference for the semicolon and warrants the conclusion that in balanced constructions the comma should be used only when some special effect may thereby be gained.

The second part of our investigation will attempt to divide all coördinating connectives into two classes according as they do or do not require the semicolon.¹ The former will be called grammatical, or 'structural,' the latter non-structural, or 'logical.' Such a division may be based upon the following differentiae:

A structural connective is always the first word of the clause. It may follow a period, a semicolon, or a comma, but it can never be imbedded within the clause. Consequently it can never be combined with another structural connective, tho it may precede any logical connective when the meaning permits or requires it.

On this basis the following connectives are structural: *and*, *but*, *or*, *for*, *nor*.

A logical connective may always be imbedded within the clause. Consequently it may be preceded by a structural

¹ The colon, which is used more rarely, has of course the same structural significance as the semicolon.

or another logical connective. When placed at the beginning of the clause it requires the semicolon or its structural equivalent.

On this basis the following connectives are logical: *accordingly, also, besides, consequently, hence, however, indeed, moreover, nevertheless, now, otherwise, still, then, therefore.*

To this list must be added the exceptional connectives *yet, only, else, and so*, which require especial notice.

The connective *yet* seems to be logical in that it may be combined with a structural connective or imbedded within the clause; yet modern writers use it freely with the comma. This anomaly may be explained if we consider the preceding clause dependent, thus involving an omitted *altho*, as in the following sentence:

But though such special rules might be of service to the literary critic, . . . yet it can hardly be the duty of literary criticism to formulate them. Winchester, *Principles of Literary Criticism*, p. 147.

The connective *else*, which is also freely used with the comma, (in *Felix Holt* 18 times) may be considered a kind of compromise between *or* and *otherwise*. It seems to take the place of a condition obversely implied in the preceding clause:

It was not so well for a lawyer to be over-honest, else he might not be up to other people's tricks. George Eliot, *Felix Holt*.

Only, when used with the comma, adds a qualifying and therefore subordinate clause, and is usually equivalent to *except that*:

. . . . ; a very keen and clear argument, only the facts are all against it. Swinburne, *Essays and Studies*, p. 168.

'Tis the same thing as the Tuileries at Paris, only the park has a certain beauty of simplicity which cannot be described. Thackeray, *George the First*.

Last, but by no means least troublesome of these excep-

tional connectives, is *so*. According to every principle which determines the classification of connectives, *so* should be 'logical,' but memories of the nursery have endeared it to us as the most docile and serviceable of beasts for an easy jog along the byways of syntax. The best writers, however, avoid it as a structural connective. In twenty of the authors read I find not a single example of such usage. It does occur once in Arnold, Carlyle, Irving, Newman, and Ruskin, but the sentence is in no instance a strong one, seldom rising above the level of the following example :

. . . . ; and there is a pretty piece of modern political economy besides, worth preserving note of, I think, so I print it in the note below. Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies*.

For the worst specimen, however, we are indebted to Mr. Saintsbury :

Doggerel (my printers prefer this spelling, and they have Chaucer at their back, so, though I myself write it "doggrell," I have not thought it worth while to trouble them with correction throughout) is a subject as inseparably connected with prosody as vice is with virtue. Saintsbury, *History of English Prosody*, I, p. 392.

The hotbed of the structural *so* is the novel and the familiar letter. Yet novelists differ widely in this respect. George Eliot's *Felix Holt* reveals only 4 examples, all in conversation ; Meredith's *Egoist* 16, half of which are in conversation ; Brontë's *Jane Eyre* 8 ; Dickens's *Pickwick Papers* 29, 15 of which are in conversation. Hawthorne's *Marble Faun* is guiltless of a single structural *so*.

In familiar letters the writer feels even more free from the restraints of formal prose. In 419 pages of *Science and Christian Tradition* Huxley uses this *so* but once, in 200 pages of his letters, 24 times. Twelve hundred pages of Stevenson's essays and travels contain 3 examples as against 8 in 200 pages of his letters. It is especially worthy of

notice, however, that in both novels and letters in which the structural *so* abounds, the logical *so* occurs almost as frequently in sentences that are structurally identical. The only justification for the use of the comma seems to be that it reproduces the effect of careless or slovenly speech.

Other logical connectives may occasionally be found with the comma alone. *Otherwise* is thus used, but once only, by Darwin, De Quincey, George Eliot, Meredith, and Mr. Saintsbury. Mr. Saintsbury again gives us the choicest example :

That neither was a poet of absolutely the first class may be granted, otherwise they would have done more than they did ; . . . Saintsbury, *History of English Prosody*, I, p. 305.

But since we find, all told, only 24 examples of any kind in about 14,000 pages of formal prose (or 1 to every 583 pages), there is no escape from the conclusion that the modern writer who takes any pride in the integrity of his style will be found to observe most scrupulously this fundamental distinction between structure and logic.

We have now reached the end of our quest and may briefly summarize. The modern English sentence, far from being a will-o-the-wisp, difficult to define or classify, reveals a clearly marked structure in accordance with the following principles :—

Every independent clause is, structurally speaking, an independent sentence and must be separated from other independent clauses by a period or its structural equivalent.

There are four structural equivalents of the period ; namely, the semicolon (or colon), the structural connective, the series, and the balance.

A comma is never the structural equivalent of a period.

The use of the comma alone between independent clauses not in series or balance implies structural dependence and is

justifiable only in clearly defined cases of *Veiled Subordination*, in *Common Restriction*, and in *Tags*.

A logical connective is never the structural equivalent of a period.

The use of the comma alone before a logical connective is the mark of an illiterate, slovenly, or careless style.

RAYMOND D. MILLER.